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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF REGIONAL PLANNING IN BRITAIN AND THE NETHERLANDS^{1, 2}

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ABSTRACT

Coordinated and comprehensive regional planning is the most-desired objective of any contemporary planner. Such an approach has been adopted both in the Netherlands and in Britain with varying emphasis, though these countries are among the world's pioneers in modern town and regional planning.

Both countries have been greatly influenced by the Garden City concept of Howard. The themes of deconcentration, development of less-advanced areas, establishment of new towns, and location of industrial nuclei have been implemented in both countries as aspects of regional planning. Of the two, the Netherlands has achieved more success, as it has molded the above ideas to suit the requirements of the country, whereas Britain is implementing the themes more conservatively. The experiences of both countries in matters of regional planning are so revealing that they should help Americans to draw some conclusions which may have universal application.

INTRODUCTION

The science of regional planning has come to the attention of planners, economists, geographers, and administrators only during recent times. Though some of the basic tenets of modern town-planning were introduced in the early twentieth century (in the Netherlands in 1901 and in England in 1909), the necessity of regional planning was not seriously realized until during and after World War II. The experiences obtained from different town-plans led to the realization that an organic integration of such plans was overdue. Since then, many nations have developed a regional outlook in planning. Thus, England and the Netherlands may be considered to be pioneers in this direction. Based on both English and Dutch experiences, the author makes a plea in this paper for a comprehensive and coordinated approach to regional planning which could have universal application, including that in the United States.

Some Definitions

Before entering into a discussion of the basis of planning and its practices in Britain and the Netherlands, an explanation of some terms used in this paper is desirable.

Region — The term "region" has been used in many ways. Each of the following definitions taken together contains elements of the term "region" as used in this paper: (1) "A more or less defined portion of the earth's surface . . . as distinguished by certain natural features, climatic conditions, a special fauna or flora, or the like" (Oxford Dictionary, 1961); (2) "An area, space or place, state of con-

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dition having a certain character or subject to certain influences" (Oxford Dictionary, 1961); and (3) "Any segment or portion of earth surface is a region if it is homogeneous in terms of areal groupings" (Whittlesey, 1954). A region may be delineated on the basis of homogeneity within an area determined either by any single factor such as relief of the land, density of population, or newspaper circulation, or by a composite of physical and socio-economic factors. The latter point of view seems to be more scientific and contemporary.

Planning — Planning is a program or a scheme of action formulated by governments, private or public corporations, or local administrators of public and private agencies to propose and put into effect certain developments affecting places or human beings. Scientific planning is set up in light of pre-defined stretch of time for completion, such as short-term span (perhaps two years) or long-term span (twenty years or more). Modern planning methods are becoming more and more mathematical, and analytical results are now obtained from computer programming. The interaction of different elements are studied through recently developed techniques of linear programming and systems analysis. In the present context, the author is examining planning pertaining to regions only.

Comprehensive — The term "comprehensive" as used in this study refers to a balanced approach. In matters of regional planning, such an approach has two aspects: areal dimension and interdisciplinary attitude. Areally, a region has to be viewed within the framework of national and international perspectives; subregional consideration is also essential for effectiveness in planning. The need for an interdisciplinary approach arises from the fact that social and man-made systems cannot be diagnosed by a single discipline. For instance, a city is an extremely complex social system, the components of which are composed of physical, locational, economic, and social elements. Each aspect of the city lies in a reciprocal causal relation to every other (Webber, 1963). Such an inter-relationship is also true in both the inter- and intra-regional contexts. Economists, political scientists, sociologists, transportation engineers, hydrologist, geographers, planners, etc., play significant roles in contributing to regional science (Isard and Reiner, 1966). The interactions of regional processes can best be understood by interdisciplinary approaches and by viewing the region in its appropriate areal hierarchy.

Coordination — The term "coordination" has relevance in this study in the context of administrative setup. Well-coordinated regional planning necessitates setting up an organizational hierarchy both for inter- and intra-regional purposes. Such an organization should have clearly drawn functional definitions for each of its hierarchal units, so that each unit may realize what its activities and jurisdictions ought to be.

BRITAIN

The genesis of British regional planning may be traced back to 1932, when *The Town and Country Planning Act* empowered contiguous local bodies to cooperate voluntarily to prepare inter-county plans. The intention was to solve common problems affecting more than one county. Though the counties faced many problems, their parochialism hardly enabled them to formulate any effective regional plan. The "voluntary" aspect of the *Act* did not bring about the desired result.

It is here necessary to give a brief explanation of the English administrative system. The Central Government has two sub-units: county and county borough. The latter refers to a sub-unit meant only for the administration of cities or larger urban units. The county administration is similar to that of the counties in most of the United States. The county has four subdivisions: municipal borough, urban district, rural district, and parish. The parish is the least important of all units, because it is the smallest and the most rural.

The Town and Country Planning Act of 1947 went a step further than that of 1932 in fostering regional outlook by taking away the power of preparing plans from the lower local bodies—the municipal borough, the rural district, and the urban district (the parish was never entrusted with planning on its own). Only the two higher local bodies, the county and the county borough, were empowered by the *Act* to prepare development plans. The development plans of the county boroughs relate mostly to the component parts of the conurbations (conurbation is a British term for the urban complex consisting of continuously built-up areas around a large city). Thus, within a conurbation there may be several county boroughs, each with their own jurisdictions and objectives of planning. County plans are in the nature of micro-regional plans. Effective regional coordination between county and county borough and between county and county is still lacking because of the absence of regional organizations promulgated by appropriate legislation.

Recently, some efforts have been made to bridge the gap between the efforts of the Central Government and those of the counties by dividing all of Britain into nine economic planning regions. Regional economic boards and councils have also been constituted, with the purpose of formulating regional economic development plans. Such was the endeavor of the Central Government in 1964. Since then, each of the respective regions has prepared or is in the process of preparing an economic development program. *The South-East Study* (1964) and *The West Midlands, a Regional Study* (1965) are examples of such completed programs. Nonetheless, it remains a fact that the regional boards, councils, and programs are being superimposed on the counties and the county boroughs, for the latter have no effective say in their operation or recommendations. Moreover, the county boroughs and the counties are directly responsible to the Central Government and are not in any way responsible to the regional boards or councils. The regional programs are likely to remain as academic research programs only because they are advisory in nature. They are not comprehensive, because of their primarily "economic" objectives and the lack of proper physical perspectives. The boards and councils, during the last four years of operation, have attained little tangible achievement (Dutt, 1969a). The councils and boards face difficulty and crisis; they simply exist as research organizations without any power to effectuate these plans (Eversley, 1967).

Deconcentration

The main thread of regional approach to planning in Britain has two dimensions, city-regional and national. The effective physical basis for city-regional planning was laid down in 1944 by Abercrombie's *Greater London Plan*. It formalized certain concepts, which had by then established deep roots in the country because of the popularization of Howard's Garden City idea.

Howard's book, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*, was published in 1902. The book and Howard's Garden City movement have cast far-reaching influences on the thinking of British planning. Even now British planners are following the broad concepts of Howard with certain modifications. The concepts are as follows:

- a) deconcentration of industries and population from contiguously built-up areas of the metropolis;
- b) establishing a five-to-ten-mile-wide green belt around the metropolis; and
- c) building new and expanded towns beyond the green belt to accommodate metropolitan spillover.

Following the concepts of Abercrombie's *Plan*, the other city-regions of Britain, Birmingham, Glasgow, and Manchester have formulated plans, during the post-World War II period, to combat their own development problems. In all cases, the jurisdiction affects the continuously built-up areas of the cities, the conurba-

tions, and the surrounding green belts, extending far beyond the limits of the city. Planning for the conurbations naturally involves the interests of the several adjacent counties. Except for the Greater London Council, however, there is no inter-county metropolitan regional planning authority in Great Britain that can tackle such problems. Such a situation is a real impediment in implementing the regional plans. Moreover, the metropolitan or city-regional plans in Britain are essentially urbanization programs, because they do not take into consideration the planning of future rural development—agricultural production and rural settlement patterns.

The idea of New Towns is really novel and a genuine challenge to the gigantic concentration of the metropolis. The New Towns policy has been called by Peter Hall (1967) "a unique solution to the universal problem of metropolitan growth." The British New Towns took organized form only after the inception of the Abercrombie Plan of 1944. They are separated from the conurbation by a five-to-ten-mile-wide green belt (fig. 1). The New Towns are designed to accommodate both overspill population and overspill industries from any nearby city or metropolis, for the purpose of relieving the problem of congestion and for allowing future growth of an overgrown urban area. In all cases, however, the New Towns are located within the metropolitan region of the central city, i.e., within a 50-to-75-mile radius. Unlike New Towns of United States, which are primarily bedroom or dormitory towns, the British New Towns are planned to combine both living and working in the same town, thus minimizing commutation to the city (Thomas, 1969).

The success pattern of the British New Towns policy, however, lies in the questions: How many New Towns? in how many years? and at what cost? Though legislation for New Towns in Britain was enacted 23 years ago, several are still under construction at enormous cost. By 1964 the Central Government already has spent £359 million for the building of New Towns (James, 1966). A country cannot afford to spend unreasonably high amounts for urban building only. Britain is no exception to this case. As a result, the pace of New Towns building has been slowed. Recently, the orthodox Abercrombie type of New Towns has been replaced by proposed larger communities (New Cities), such as the suggested selection of Southampton-Portsmouth for accommodating a 250,000 overspill population from the London Area (*The South-East Study*, 1964). In fact, the volume of overspill is so large that planned redistribution in new communities (New Towns and Cities, or Expanded New Towns) is becoming impossible.

Green Belts, which spread around the conurbations, are kept free of internal urban construction, although agricultural and recreational developments are permitted and the pre-existing settlements are allowed to develop enough new housing to keep pace with their natural growth. In actual practice, the allowance of development in pre-existing settlements is taken advantage of by metropolitan overspill, and the latter fills in the settlement-enclaves within the Green Belt within a much shorter time than would have occurred as planned by the Metropolitan Planning authorities. The sanctity of the Green Belts is occasionally violated by residential extensions sponsored by city authorities, such as those in Birmingham in 1964. London has also done this several times. In the case of London, both the industries and the overspill population settle beyond the metropolitan Green Belt. Thus, new extra-conurbation settlements continue to derive the locational advantages of their nearness to London. Such a situation in no way relieves metropolitan traffic problems. As a matter of fact, it has accentuated regional concentration in the London area. This has happened despite government controls (*The South-East Study*, 1964). The official New Towns policy further accentuates the process of such concentration because it increases the density of the metropolitan region.

At the national level, British regional planning has taken two important steps—

recognition of ten development areas for industrial stimulation, and the adoption of a national plan. As a result of the *Barlow Commission Report* (1940) and of post-war parliamentary legislation, ten areas in Britain were designated "Development Areas." These areas are all located around the old urban-industrial centers and are identified as centers of continuous unemployment. The national government encourages expansion of old industries and establishment of new ones in those areas as a matter of regional industrialization policy. One of the main reasons for taking such a step is to decentralize industries and population from the London Area (South-East England), but even now the latter is growing much faster than any other region of the country (*South-East Study*, 1964).

Britain has recently adopted a *National Plan* (1965). The most important goal put forth in this plan is to overcome the difficulty of balance of payments by acceleration of national production. During the last four years, especially after the devaluation of the sterling, a good deal of progress was registered in this regard. In formulating production targets, the industrial sector was planned to register maximum growth, and the overall increase in national production was earmarked to be 25 percent between 1964 and 1970. For the first time in the history of British planning, regional development was considered within the broad framework of national economic goals. A full chapter in the official *National Plan* has been devoted to an explanation of the regional implications of planning (*National Plan*, 1965).

The regional implications of the *National Plan* may be summarized as follows:

- a) control of office development in the London and Birmingham conurbations;
- b) continued building of new factories in areas earmarked as "Development Areas;" and
- c) formulation of steps for faster economic development in less-developed areas.

Britain does not have any official plan for guiding the physical expansion of its urban areas. Doxiadis's portrayal of a future megalopolis is indicative of the fact that a very small area of the country will remain out of megalopolitan jurisdiction (1966) (fig. 2). Such a projection also points to the urgent need for more meaningful national and regional planning.

THE NETHERLANDS, AS COMPARED WITH BRITAIN

Micro-regional Plans

As in Britain, the genesis of Dutch regional planning may also be traced to the year 1932, when the *Housing Act* was amended to enable neighboring municipalities to join hands voluntarily for the preparation of regional plans. And as in Britain, the effect was discouraging. Hardly any municipality could abandon its parochialism and think in terms of a broader, regional perspective. Thus, the voluntary element of cooperation did not bring about the desired regional planning activities. As a further step, in 1941, *Provincial Physical Planning Services* were set up during Nazi occupation.

The Netherlands has a three-tier administrative system (central government, provinces, and municipalities), in contrast to the centuries-old two-tier system of Britain (central government and county). Such a system helps the Netherlands formulate micro-regional plans under the jurisdiction of the provinces. The *National and Regional Planning Act* of 1950, first enforced in 1951, formalized the establishment of Provincial Planning Services on a permanent basis, and empowered the Services to prepare both provincial and micro-regional plans, the latter of which are inter-municipal in character. The *Physical Planning Act* of 1962, enforced only since 1965, further strengthened the position of the Provincial Services by entrusting the final authority for approval of the intra-provincial plans to the provincial governments (*Physical Planning Act*, 1962).

The Provincial Planning Services, which are responsible to the respective provincial governments, subdivide the provinces into a number of regions, each consisting of several municipalities. The Provincial Services then prepare, in consultation with the municipalities, regional development plans for each region, here-

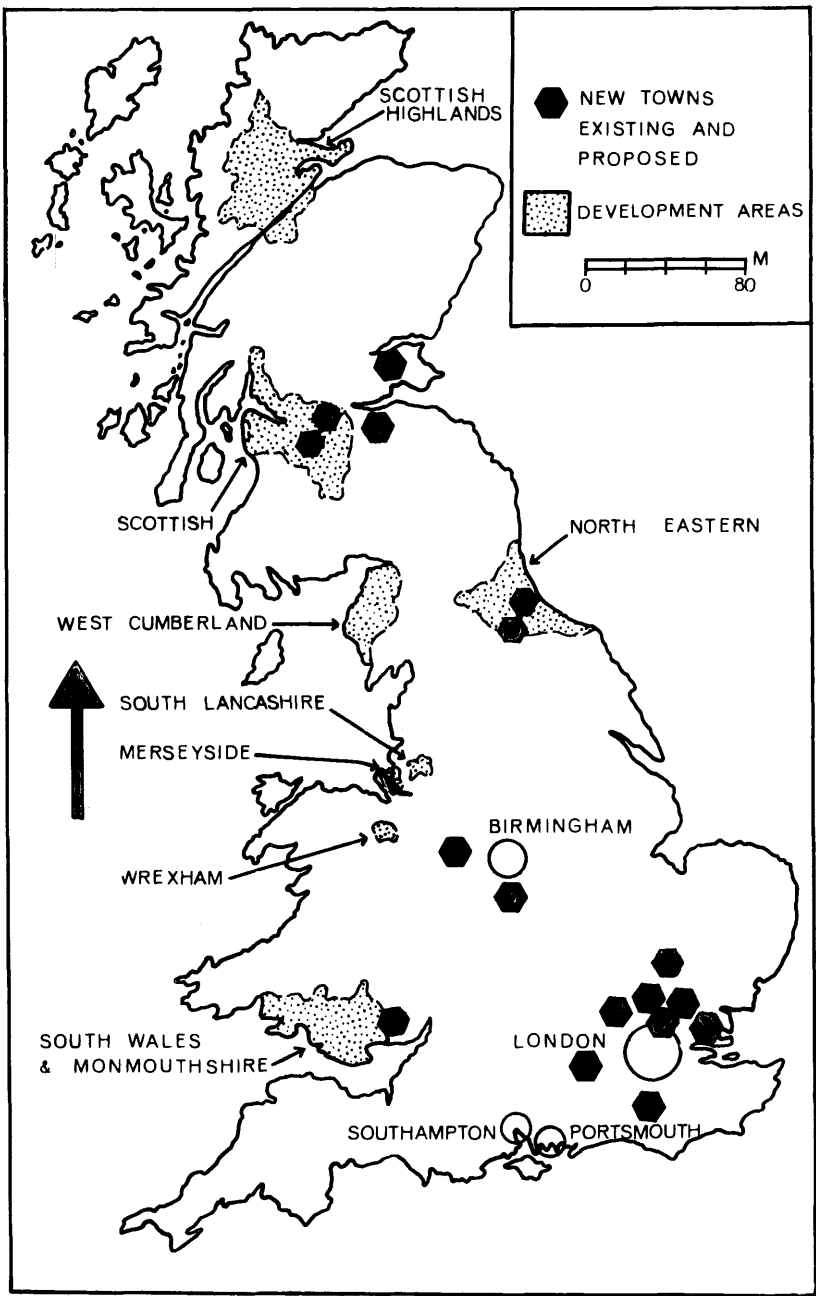


FIGURE 1. Location of new towns and development areas in Britain.

after referred to as micro-regions. Due consideration is also given to the problems and pre-existing plans of the individual municipalities. Thus, unlike the regional economic-development programs of Britain, they are not superimposed on the municipal bodies. Compared to Britain, the micro-regional plans in the Nether-

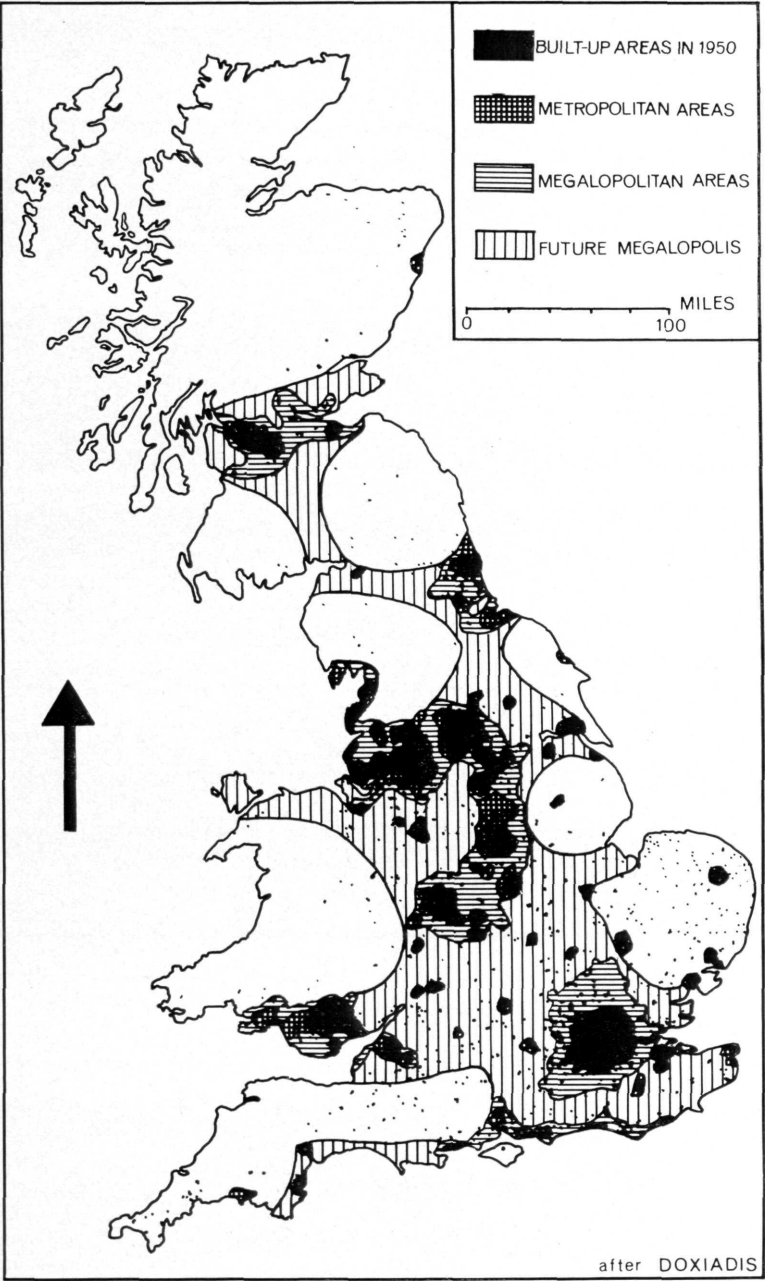


FIGURE 2. The existing urban areas and the future probable megalopolis of Britain.

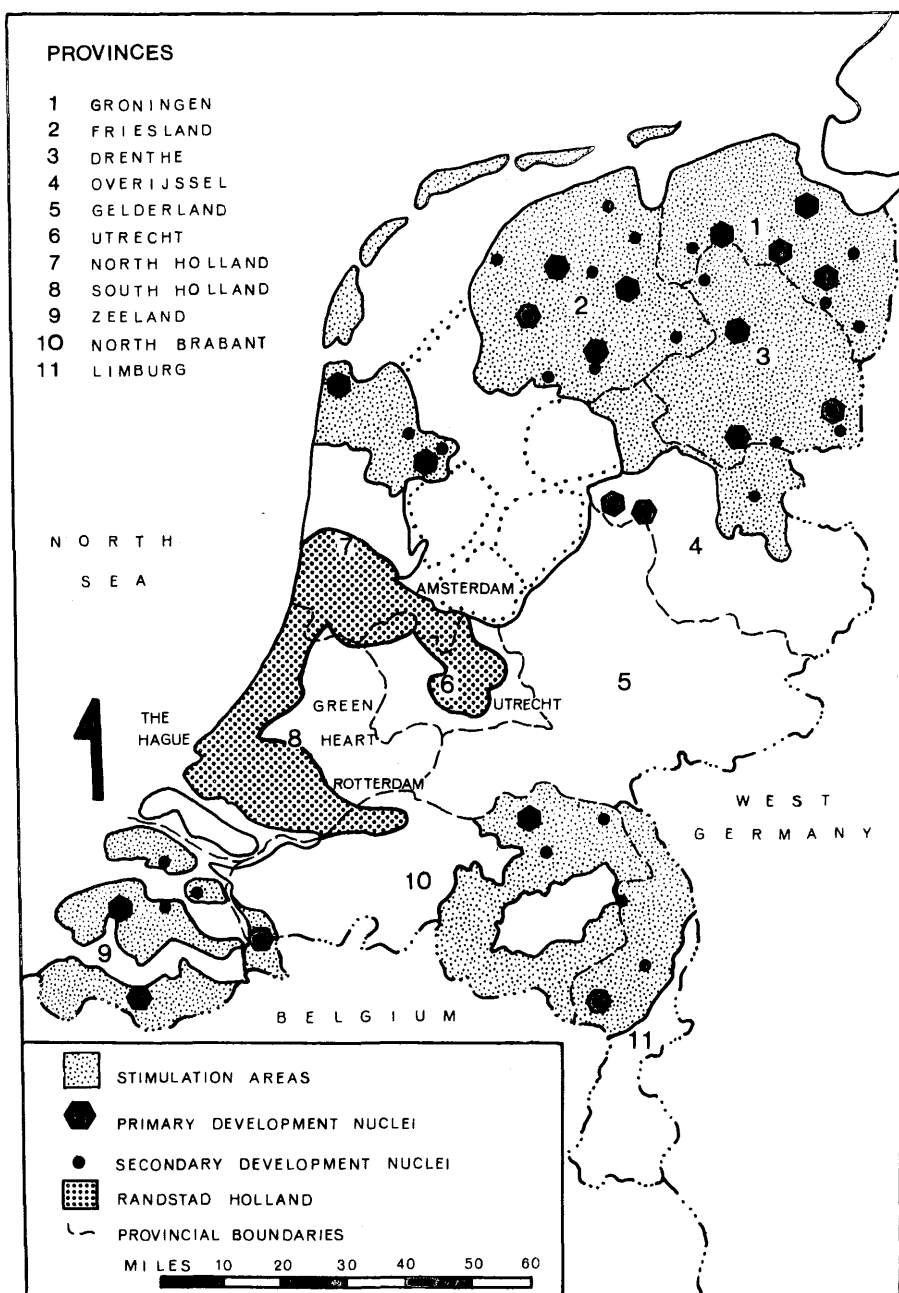


FIGURE 3. Netherlands: the provincial boundaries, Randstad Holland, Greenheart, stimulation areas and development nuclei.

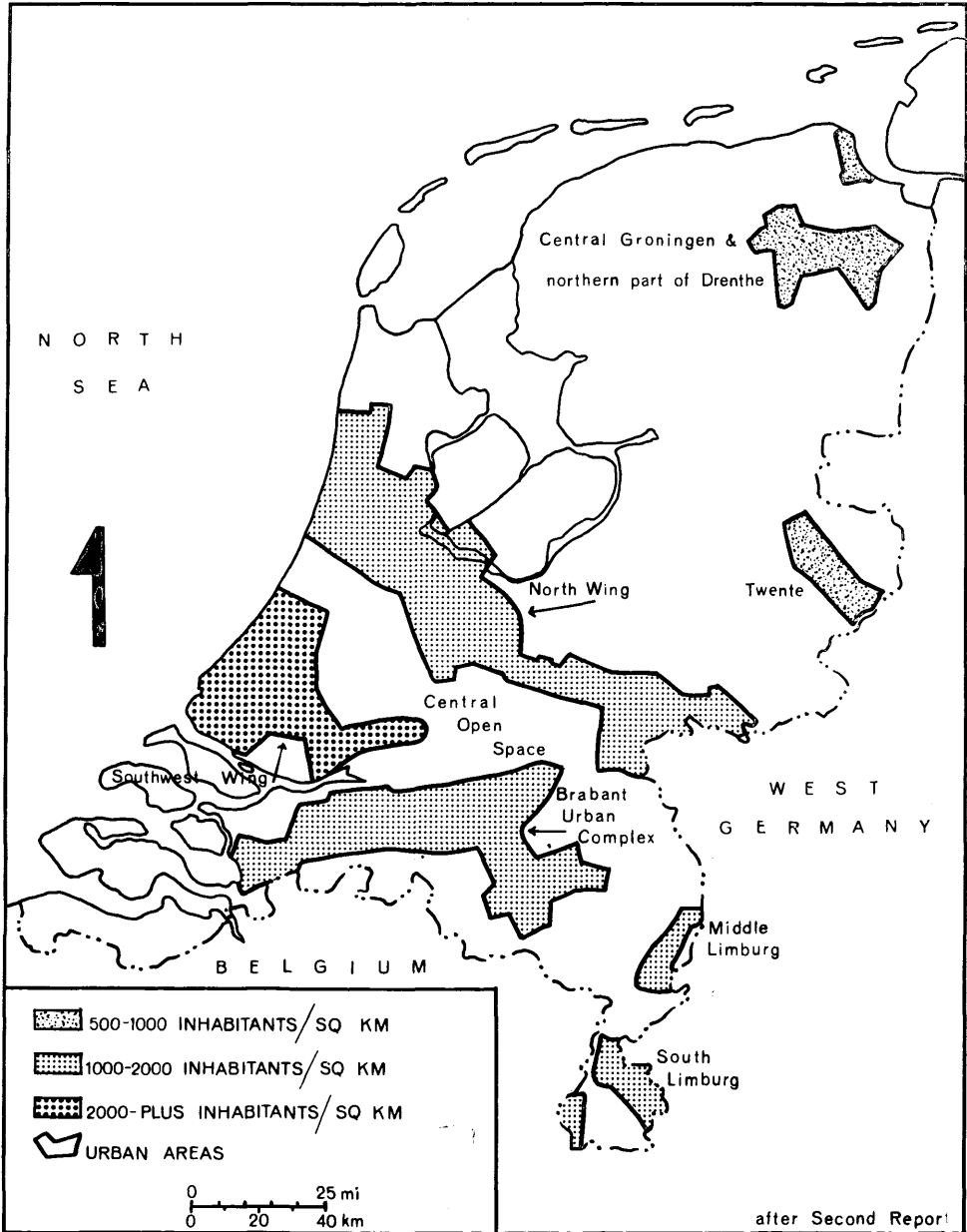


FIGURE 4. The strategy of future urban growth patterns in the Netherlands.

lands are comparatively more comprehensive, as they are not only urban development programs, but are also physical land-use plans for both rural and urban areas.

In matters of areal dimension, the micro-regions of the Netherlands may be compared to the counties of Britain; both are too small to develop regional outlooks in themselves, unless a broader regional view is brought into consideration. In the Netherlands, the micro-regional plans are prepared by the provinces which are large enough to promote such outlooks. In contrast the counties in Britain are responsible to the national government and are therefore unable to develop a proper regional outlook, other than working within the framework of some of the nationally accepted broad regional principles. The recently constituted regional boards and councils in Britain are a step forward toward bridging the gap, but they are in no way comparable to the powerful and effective Provincial Services of the Netherlands, because the latter derive their administrative authority from the provincial governments.

Metropolitan Planning

The metropolitan problems of the Netherlands differ from those of Britain because the former has only one large urban agglomeration, consisting of Rotterdam, The Hague, Haarlem, Amsterdam, and Utrecht, all of which, taken together, are known as "Randstad Holland" or Conurbation Holland (fig. 3). In contrast, Britain has several conurbations, separated from one another. Thus, in the Netherlands, the metropolitan development program pertains only to a single conurbation, whereas in Britain, there exist a number of metropolitan plans. The regional approach for planning Randstad Holland, which was first set forth by the National Physical Planning Service (*Report—West of the Land*, 1958), may be summarized as follows.

- a) The existing urban areas within the conurbation (Randstad Holland) should not be allowed to coalesce, and "green buffers" must be maintained between them.
- b) The horseshoe-like Randstad Holland should not be allowed to grow inward; all future growth should be channeled outward—centrifugally—in response to the need of a "green heart" within the horseshoe.
- c) Except for those industrial developments which are necessary within Randstad Holland, locations of all new industrial units are encouraged to be within the less developed areas ("Stimulus Areas").

More recently, the main policies for the Netherlands's national physical planning organization have been outlined by the national government, which has laid out the strategy for the future spatial perspective of Randstad as follows (Second Report Part I, 1966):

1. considerable further expansion of the Randstad;
2. expansion leading to further increase in population density of the South-western Wing, i.e., within The Hague—Rotterdam urban area;
3. evolution of a North Brabant urban complex; and
4. the "green heart" giving place to a Y-shaped "central open space" (fig. 4).

In essence, the above approach is similar to that of the British metropolitan planning, but in the Netherlands the same broad principles of Howard have been implemented to suit the country's unique conditions.

Macro-regional Approach at the National Level

The Netherlands has also developed some regional approaches in national planning. One of them is the establishment of "Stimulus Areas." The "Stimulus Areas," established since 1951, refer to the less developed areas of the country, identified on the basis of cyclical unemployment and out-migration. The pur-

pose of these Areas is to stimulate development here by subsidizing new industries and expanding old ones, by providing the infra-structure of transportation, and by establishing modern town facilities. One of the purposes of such a policy is to decentralize industries from Randstad Holland. Basically, such an approach is comparable to the British "Development Areas." In actual practice, in this connection, both countries have faced similar problems. The *Report—West of the Land* (1958) in the Netherlands and the *Barlow Commission Report* (1940) in Britain are both proponents of urban and industrial decentralization, but the *Report—West of the Land* is mainly oriented toward physical planning, whereas the principle orientation of the *Barlow Report* is economic. The difference between the two is evident in the following aspects.

- a) The "Stimulus Areas" in the Netherlands consist of large geographic units, compared to the smaller enclaves of the "Development Areas" of Britain. Such larger areas provide greater opportunity to effect multi-faceted regional planning in the "Stimulus Areas."
- b) Though the Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs is the main sponsor of the "Stimulus Areas" program, the other departments of the government have recognized it and thus contribute to the success of the program (Dutt, 1968); therefore, a comprehensive approach is made to stimulate those areas through industrial, transport, social, and agricultural development.
- c) Instead of fostering industrial stimulation in the whole of the "Stimulus Areas", a number of nuclei have been selected within the Areas where industrial development is encouraged. It is easier to industrialize a limited number of centers than to spread the industries throughout an area. The Dutch "Stimulus Area" and "Industrial nuclei" concept represent a unique combination of centralization within the broad framework of decentralization.

The Netherlands has a National Physical Planning Service which was first instituted in 1941 by decree. Its powers and functions were subsequently redefined by the *National and Regional Planning Act* of 1951 and by the *Physical Planning Act* of 1962. Though the *Act* of 1951 directed the Service to prepare a national physical plan, it was felt inadvisable in subsequent years for a free-economy country like the Netherlands to embark on a path of rigid planning. Therefore, the idea of a national physical plan was dropped in the *Act* of 1962, which simply empowered the Service to formulate national planning policies based on research into basic problems in the field of physical planning and in consultation with the related ministries (Physical Planning, 1961).

The Service has registered some important achievements. As has been mentioned earlier, it formulated a general planning principle for the future growth pattern of the Randstad Holland in consultation with the three provinces, North Holland, South Holland, and Utrecht. The Service prepared broad outlines for national physical planning in 1966 (Second Report, Part I, 1966). The approaches of the Report are generally comprehensive, as the Report encompasses all the relevant facets of planning, and finally proposes a generalized land-use map of the Netherlands for the year 2000 (fig. 5). The Report, however, has deficiencies. It provides suggestions and not mandatory directives for future planning. Steigenga (1968, p. 106) comments on the Report in the following words:

The report still faces the present and future problems from a too-narrow-angle point of view. It neglects the necessity to stress the steering of social and economic processes. It still favors a more equal distribution of population over the country, and again the report approaches the spatial problems on national level in the way physical planning dealt with local planning problems. Again much attention has been paid to the rural de-

velopment areas in the northern provinces; the urban problem areas (failing infrastructure, high density dwelling areas, housing shortage) have been neglected. A more principal and political objection against this report is that no alternatives have been published; only one so-called structural sketch of a possible solution in the future, fixed for the year 2000, has been given.

Endeavors are being made by the Service to prepare broad planning policies for other regions of the Netherlands—North, East, South-east, and South. Moreover, the Provincial Physical Planning Services work in close collaboration with the National Service. In contrast, Britain does not have such physical planning perspective for the nation as a whole.

The Netherlands has a national economic plan which has been prepared for a four-year period. The plans were formulated by the Central Planning Bureau and were then adopted by the National Government. The plan is not a set of development projects. Unlike the British national plan, it does not set up future production targets. Rather, the plan is intended to help the government take steps against unnecessary wage increases and inflation, and to promote and increase national production. The economic plan in the Netherlands was prepared independently of the National Physical Planning Service by means of sophisticated economic models. In other words, there is a lack of effective collaboration between economic and physical planning, which is very much against the spirit of comprehensive planning. An interdisciplinary approach—a combination of physical and economic factors—may pave the way for balanced and more meaningful planning.

GENERALIZATIONS DERIVED FROM THE COMPARISON OF THE TWO APPROACHES TO COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

It is now possible to make some philosophical generalizations, based on British and Dutch regional planning experiences, and to establish some basic tenets about comprehensive planning.

1. Enunciation of national planning objectives provides the basis for regional planning. Both Britain and the Netherlands have declared some such objectives. Only the defined objectives can form the basis for inter-regionally coordinated planning.
2. For lower-level regional planning units, the immediate upper-level regions should provide broad regional goals. Thus, along with the creation of a hierarchy of planning organizations, there should exist a hierarchy of planning goals and objectives. Such an approach is more clearly defined in the Netherlands than in Britain.
3. For effective functioning and undertaking of regional problems, it is necessary to have regional organizations constituted by legislation. Such an organization should not be set up simply on the basis of "voluntary" cooperation of lower local units; rather, the latter should be obligated by law to form such organizations, either on their own or by an enforceable decree from some upper administrative unit. Such strong law enforcement may have to be exerted for the greater interest of the region. Both Britain and the Netherlands have taken steps in this direction.
4. Development of backward areas and decongestion of densely urbanized areas within a country are interrelated problems. Efforts to solve one without consideration of the other are fruitless. The Dutch policy in this connection seems to be more coordinated.
5. The concept of Garden Cities has been implemented in Britain in the form of New Towns, and the concept is followed conservatively. This concept has received quite different interpretation in the Netherlands in

the form of Industrial Nuclei in the "Stimulus Areas," which seems to be a more realistic adaptation of the basic concept.

6. To effect decentralization from a national point of view, the Dutch effort seems to be more effective, whereas the British New Towns marginal to the over-congested conurbations lead to further brick-and-mortar concentrations regionally.

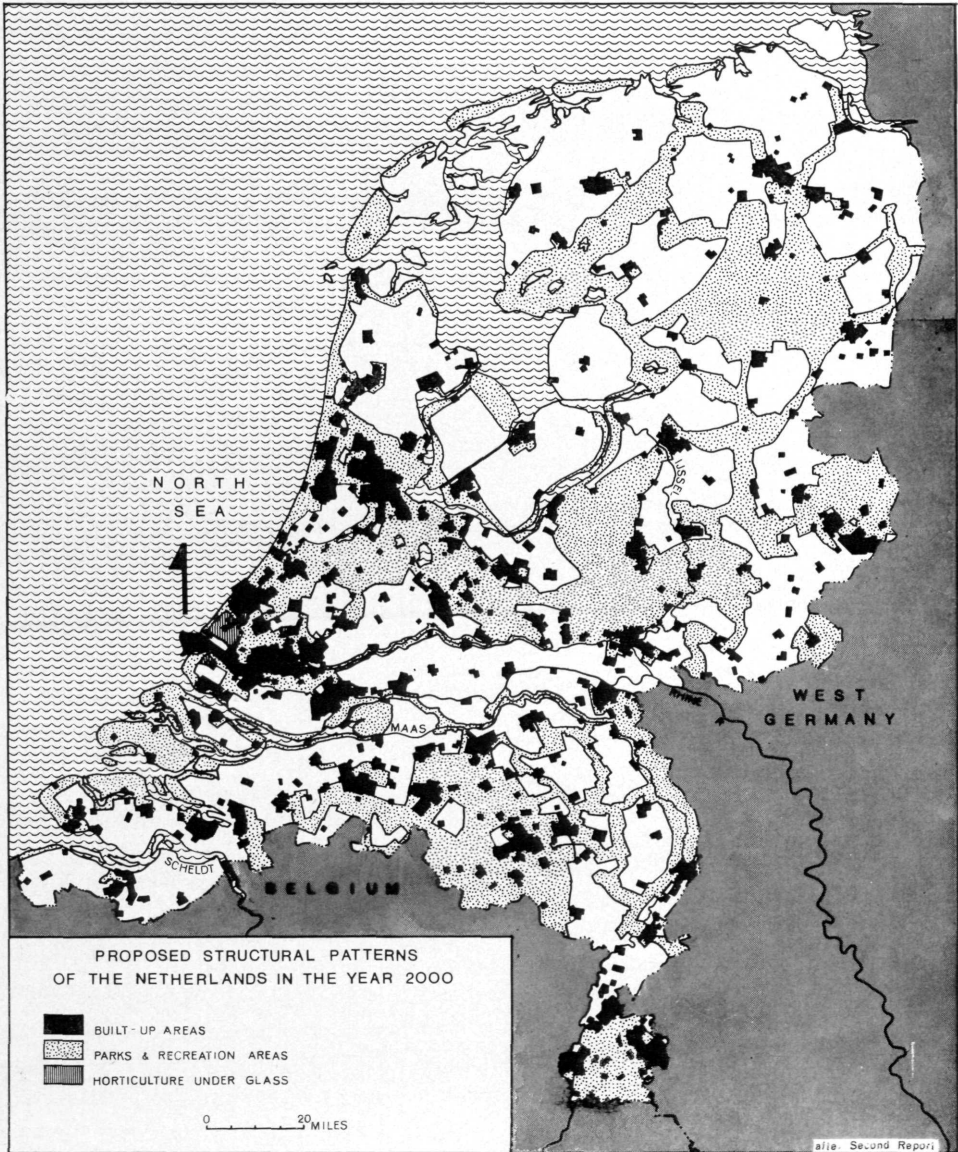


FIGURE 5. The Netherlands in the year 2000.

7. The concept of a green belt is not a static one. Changes in technology and cultural values of life may necessitate a change in the location, shape, and form of the green belt. British policy in this regard is rigidly and unrealistically conservative, while the Dutch planners are still experimenting with the best-suited design and characteristics of the green belt.

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